

**Statement of Senator Herb Kohl**  
**Ranking Member, Senate Special Committee on Aging**

Good morning. We welcome everyone to this hearing on the subject of the increasing number of older Americans who are working longer. Thank you, Chairman Smith, for continuing the bipartisan tradition of this Committee and allowing us to put this hearing together today.

We also want to thank all of our witnesses. Mr. Robinson, we especially want to thank you for coming today – because we know you have a game this afternoon. I imagine that the Phillies’ manager, Charlie Manuel – who you are playing today – wishes you would just go ahead and retire.

During the next few decades, the number of Americans over age 65 will increase from 12 percent of our population to almost 20 percent. This demographic wave will require us all to adjust our perceptions of what retirement means in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Fortunately, today’s generation of seniors are living longer, are healthier, and are staying active and productive in their communities. They share an astonishing history – building our economy into the strongest in the world; fighting for the freedoms we enjoy today; raising families and fostering communities. Seniors are a treasure trove of knowledge, experience and wisdom. They are an invaluable resource that we would be foolish not to make the most of.

Today, older Americans not only have the ability to work longer, but many also have the desire. Health has been on a steady incline, and jobs are physically less demanding. According to a recent survey by the AARP, 80 percent of baby boomers expect to work into their retirement years. Today, only 13% of people over 65 are in the workforce. This is a remarkable demographic shift.

Older Americans are choosing to work for many reasons. 74-year-old Eugene Schulist from Milwaukee is working part-time because he says it keeps his mind sharp and gives him a good balance of work and free time. Arline Ruhs, an 85-year old factory worker from Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, shows up early and works overtime because it keeps her active each day. And Ella Clarke Nuite of Georgia, who is 100 years old and was recently

honored by Experience Works as America's Outstanding Older Worker, still runs her small business and believes that work keeps her healthier.

Whatever the reason people decide to stay on the job, it's time to change the way we think about retirement. A one-size-fits-all approach will no longer match the very different plans that seniors and baby boomers have for their later years.

Rethinking retirement is also vital to our nation's economic future. With more Americans retiring and fewer younger workers to replace them, companies face a labor force shortage – we could face a gap of about 18 million workers by 2020. In the future, our economy will increasingly depend on keeping experienced employees in the workforce.

Some businesses have already begun to recognize the talent of our nation's seniors. We need to encourage their efforts and take a close look at laws that make it difficult for them to attract and keep older workers. For example, we could re-examine pension laws to find ways to encourage “phased retirement” – a gradual transition from full-time work to full retirement. We could also make job assistance and training programs more widely available to older workers. And a recent study found that companies offering elder care programs help keep people in the workforce. We look forward to learning more about these options today and working with our colleagues in the coming months to consider ideas that could help.

Today, we have two examples of seniors who continue to contribute in their mature years. Frank Robinson brings 50-plus years of work experience to his profession, and he continues to have a positive impact on the players he works with. Kathlyn Peterson still uses her lifelong experience in the medical profession to benefit hundreds of patients. They are just two examples of how the meaning of growing older is changing in our country.

Older workers have a lot to offer to businesses, their communities, and the country. Today, older Americans are healthier and more active, and many are willing and able to continue to make a contribution to the workplace and to our economy. We must incorporate this new mindset into our national culture, and develop policies that reflect this reality. Our seniors deserve it and our economic future may well depend on it.

I now turn it over to our Chairman, Senator Smith.